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The Bitter Truth

The disclosures in the Pentagon papers published by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are a damning indictment of the men who got us into the Vietnam War.

For it is now plain that the Nation's policy-makers did not stumble into the endless tunnel, but entered into it with a good idea of its pitfalls and sinuous turnings.

Why? The answer appears to be that they hoped to postpone the worst, that they were willing to pay an absurdly high price for matters of national and personal vanity.

The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence people are seen to have forecast the course of events with remarkable accuracy time after time. It was not bad advice that brought the Nation to its present plight, but an appalling cynicism on the part of the men who governed us.

As the disclosures in the hitherto secret Pentagon papers reveal, the Johnson Administration consistently sought to conceal from Congress and from the American people what were its actual intentions in Vietnam. It professed public pur-

poses to which it did not privately subscribe. It was willing to buy time with American lives and it was willing to toy with the anguish, the concern, and the desire for peace of the American people.

That much is already beyond question. The Nixon Administration has, for the moment at least, succeeded in blocking the further publication of the Pentagon papers in the *Post* or the *Times*. Complex and important legal questions have been raised and presumably are to be settled by the U.S. Supreme Court. There are no easy answers to them. It isn't enough to rally to the banner of "free press" or to the banner of "national security," such is the gravity of the issues involved.

But even if the Attorney General were to padlock *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* tomorrow, the questions that have been raised about the origins of the Vietnam War cannot be left unanswered. Nor will they go away conveniently, like Lyndon Johnson returned to Texas.

It has been all too clear for all too long that the Vietnam War is a

disaster from every rational standpoint. The dead and the wounded, the disunity and the economic dislocation that are the results of the war are evident to the American people. We have seen for ourselves that the conflict in Southeast Asia is mistaken, and tragic, and stupid as well. Are we now to believe that we were misled not by events and the logic of our own good intentions, but by cynical and evasive leaders in Washington?

For that is the implication of the Pentagon papers, and it cannot be left at that. It is absolutely essential to the credibility of the Government and the continuing function of our political system that Congress now undertake a blue-ribbon, full-scale investigation into the origins of the war.

That will be painful to some who are out of the Government and perhaps to some who are still within the Government. (Implicit is the suspicion that the Nixon Administration is getting out of Vietnam as circuitously as we got into the wretched war.) But it is mandatory now that the five-sided Pandora's Box is open to the public's view. Let's have the bitter truth.